

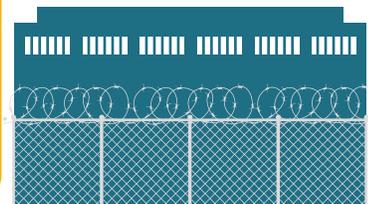
Criminalization of Mental Illness

What's the Problem?

Beginning in the 1950's, the U.S. began the process of *deinstitutionalization* – states began to empty their state mental hospitals, with the intention that people struggling with mental illness would be better served with community-based services.



However, mental hospitals were shuttered, and many states, including Ohio, never invested adequate resources in treatment for mental illness in the community. As a result, many people with mental illness go without treatment or intervention, and often end up in jails or prisons, which are not only expensive, but also ill-equipped to treat and rehabilitate the severely mentally ill.¹



2 Million People with mental illness go to jail each year.

Once in jail, people with severe mental illness or substance use disorders often:



Don't get treatment or medication for their disorder.²



Stay incarcerated for longer than people without a mental illness.³



Experience declining mental health conditions.

Once released from jail, people with severe mental illness or substance use disorders often:



Have trouble finding employment or housing because of their criminal record.⁴



Lack access to healthcare that they desperately need.⁵



End up back in jail or prison.⁶



*The rate of **recidivism** among people with co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse.⁷*

Recidivism: the repetition of criminal or delinquent behavior, most often measured as a new arrest, conviction, or return to prison and/or jail for the commission of a new crime or as the result of a violation of terms of supervision⁸

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What are Some Solutions?

Around the nation, as people recognize the cost- both human and fiscal- of the problem of mass-incarceration of the mentally ill, policymakers, advocates, and people who work in the criminal justice and behavioral health fields are coming together to create innovative local solutions to this problem.



More coordinated services are needed.

Rather than acting as silos, the criminal justice and behavioral health systems need to coordinate and streamline services and referrals between the two systems. States and counties should put policies in place to encourage utilization of assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) whereby courts order outpatient treatment for adults with severe mental illness who have a history of repeated arrests. Where implemented, AOT laws have proven successful at reducing arrest and incarceration among individuals with severe mental illness.⁹



More hospital beds are needed for people experiencing mental health crises.

States have continued to eliminate psychiatric beds in hospitals, however, hospitalization is a necessary component of care for many people with severe mental illness. The inability of local hospitals to accommodate individuals at their point of crisis is a failure of the system that often results in poor outcomes, frequently including incarceration.



More training is needed for law enforcement.

Law enforcement officers are frequently first responders to an individual in the midst of a mental health crisis who is posing a threat to his/her own safety or the safety of others. More law enforcement officers need crisis intervention training (CIT) in order to effectively deescalate someone in crisis and ensure they get the help they need.



Sources:

¹ http://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/storage/documents/final_jails_v_hospitals_study.pdf

² <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/mhppji.pdf>

³ https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/CTBNYC-Court-Jail_7-cc.pdf

⁴ <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/411617-Health-and-Prisoner-Reentry.PDF>

⁵ <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/411617-Health-and-Prisoner-Reentry.PDF>

⁶ <http://www.centerforebp.case.edu/stories/study-finds-higher-rates-of-jail-recidivism-among-people-with-co-occurring-severe-mental-illness-and-substance-use-disorders>

⁷ <http://www.centerforebp.case.edu/stories/study-finds-higher-rates-of-jail-recidivism-among-people-with-co-occurring-severe-mental-illness-and-substance-use-disorders>

⁸ https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/9-24-12_Behavioral-Health-Framework-final.pdf

⁹ <http://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/storage/documents/aot-one-pager.pdf>